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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT THURSDAY, December 14, 1933

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SUBJECT: "Christmas Greens." Information from the Forest Service, U.S.D.A.

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For years and years now we Americans have enjoyed the custom of going out to the woods around Christmas time and gathering greens as we pleased to decorate our homes--or to sell. We have had the pleasure of cutting our own Christmas tree, if we liked, and of gathering our own holly and mistletoe, laurel and ground pine for wreathes, or any of the other lovely plants that are fresh and green at this season. We've cut right and left, wherever we pleased and as much as we pleased, without thinking at all of the future and without considering whether our grandchildren and great-grandchildren would have any of these beautiful greens in their day, if we kept on chopping them down ruthlessly.

Well, in recent years the result of all this careless cutting has become painfully evident, especially all up and down the Atlantic Coast. It was one thing to cut down greens in the early days when the forest came almost up to our doorstep. It's another thing in these days when the country is well populated.

Take the case of holly, for example. Holly is probably the favorite of all our Christmas plants. Its beautiful bright red berries and dark green leaves, so fresh in midwinter, have always been in great demand for yuletide decorations. In the early days in England, people used it to decorate the churches at Christmas and some historians say that it was first called "the holy tree" for this reason. Later, people began calling it holly. Though there are about 300 species of holly distributed over the world, probably the most beautiful kinds are the English holly, with its glossy dark leaves and bunches of scarlet berries, and the American holly, which is a little smaller and has its red berries scattered along the stem. This native American holly once grew abundantly through the woods from Massachusetts to Missouri and south to Florida and Texas. But the Christmas market has taken such a heavy toll that the wild holly has now gone from New England and most of the middle-Atlantic states and it is fast disappearing everywhere. The time is actually in sight when our children may know of holly only as a myth. You see, holly grows very slowly. Its seeds take two years to germinate. So it is at a disadvantage in keeping up with the inroads on it every year. Perhaps you have noticed that much of the holly on the market in the past few years has no berries. That's another sad sign. It is the result of destructive cutting of the pistillate or female trees--the only trees that produce berries. The male trees without berries are often the only ones left nowadays for the Christmas market.

My friends in the Forest Service say that if we are to save this beautiful and valuable tree, we must not only protect what wild trees are left

in the woods, but we must also grow more holly. If we join forces to prevent promiscuous cutting and to encourage cultivated holly, the "holy tree" of tradition may still shed its cheer down through the years.

Looking at the matter of growing holly from a practical standpoint, Forest Service experts say that this is a reliable means for farmers in certain parts of the country to add to their incomes. The market demand for holly is increasing. Parts of the Southeast and the Northwest are most favorable for holly growing. You can grow holly for sale either from the wild American holly or from imported English holly. In the states of Washington and Oregon, many people have been successful in growing and thus preserving the vanishing holly. Holly ranches around Puget Sound are specializing on the beautiful English holly. This species needs a mild, humid climate. In the East it rarely survives north of Washington, D. C. If you don't want to raise holly on a large scale, grow a little tree of your own in your own front yard. You can start it as a potted plant for table use. Though it grows slowly, holly is long-lived and will produce greens for a century or more if properly managed.

To keep well, holly wreaths or branches need cold, dry surroundings. In warm muggy weather boxes of holly tend to heat during shipping. That makes the leaves discolor and the berries fall off. The experts give this advice to holly growers and shippers. But the housewife can learn a bit from it, too. If she hangs her holly wreaths on the outside of the window instead of inside, they will often keep fresh longer.

So much for holly. Now a word about some other Christmas greens that we need to protect these days. A great favorite for Christmas wreaths because it keeps well is ground pine or crowfoot, also called trailing evergreen or club moss. Because people gather this plant carelessly and pull up its long runners, it is rapidly being destroyed. And because it grows slowly as holly does, it can't make up for this destructive harvesting. If you're going out after greens this year, and are interested at all in saving our native greens for the future, rule out holly and ground pine. And rule out laurel and rhododendron, others of our native plants that are now running low in many places from too heavy cutting.

The pines and the firs, the hemlocks, spruces and cedars still provide plenty of green boughs for home decoration. And these large trees are not harmed by careful cutting of the small branches. For color you can use winterberries, Japanese barberries, and pine or spruce cones for added decoration. Your own English ivy, grown indoors and out, also makes handsome wreaths. Boxwood, also from your own property, and arbor vitae are other popular evergreens for winter use.

Friday: "Eleventh-Hour Gifts."